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Huntingdon Man Recalls Varied Career

Ex-Intelligence Man Predicted Oil Crisis In '48

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HUNTINGDON — In 1948, after Palestine was partitioned and Israel became a nation, a young man, leaving Cairo, Egypt, after a tour as an intelligence gatherer for the U.S. government, wrote a report stating "that the United States could face severe problems in the future if Arab countries gain control of the oil."

One assumes that in time, such papers get misplaced or, at least, are not taken too seriously. The stargazer who wrote the report is Ben Humble Hall, executive director of the Huntingdon Chamber of Commerce and an alderman on the city board.

After a 45-year absence from his home town, Hall returned over a year ago to "retire." His career has carried him into countries all over the world and could be described, at best, as varied.

As a copy-boy for the Evening Graphic, a sensational 1930s New York Tabloid, Hall posed for "fake photos," once as an assassin for a Mexican president who met an abrupt death over dinner. It was on that paper that he worked with Walter Winchell and Ed Sullivan, who would go on to greater fame.

Later, as a security officer for the U.S. government in India and Ghana, Hall would insure protection for vice presidents such as Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey.

Now, as he sits in his Chamber office in City Hall, the 65-year-old former CIA man wonders at the strange revelations coming out daily from the

nation's capitol, where he served for several years.

Mostly, he's a concerned man. Concerned about the E. Howard Hunts and the "Plumbers" who have given intelligence gatherers "a black-eye." Concerned, as a former government employee, about Presidents who take tax deductions on papers "prepared on government time with government equipment, paper and secretaries."

And, as he prepares for the local Rotary Club a speech entitled "Will There Be Peace in the Middle East?" Hall, who spent a few years in Egypt in the late 1940s, marvels at the "shuttle diplomacy" of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and is "optimistic."

"I'm amazed at the difference," Hall remembers. "When I was there, we had some real problems with people who had visas to Israel. You couldn't get into Arab countries if you had a visa for Israel. Now Kissinger is hopping back and forth."

But Hall refused to take any undue credit for his 1948 revelation. "It was just a general feeling most Americans working in Egypt at that time had about the situation."

"We just felt that United Nations had acted too quickly. We believed that the process should have been gradual."

"Under the influence of Russia, we felt that the Arabs could get control of oil and the United States would be in trouble."

"People thought I was crazy then," Hall laughed.

In a sense, Hall, like Dean Acheson, was "present at the creation," when the United States began to emerge as a world power, although he still is "not quite sure" why he left his newspaper work to enter government service.

Hall looks back with amusement at his newspaper career which began in the late 1920s.

"We received a wire report one day that a Mexican president had been assassinated and we needed a picture," Hall remembered.

"So, we pushed all the desks in the office together and borrowed a table cloth to make a banquet table for the 'president' and his party."

Hall joked, "They gave me a revolver and I was photographed shooting the 'president.'"

Unfortunately, "we later got another report saying that the president had been shot in the stomach and so we had to do the picture all over again."

After working 12 years with various newspapers, Hall, through a friend, received a call to come to Washington, D.C. to organize a group of men in cooperation with the British to "intercept anything countries would be putting out over the airwaves."

By then, the country, unaware that Pearl Harbor loomed in the near future, was just beginning to prepare communications lines to the White House. Army and Navy intelligence organizations had been relaying information from these coun-

Hall assembled some 500 men, mostly college professors with foreign language backgrounds, to translate and, at the same time, write in newspaper style what reports were being sent on the radios from these countries.

When the war ended, Hall was called as a witness before Grand Jury investigating charges of treason against 13 former Americans, including poet Ezra Pound and Tokyo Rose, who had broadcast anti-American statements over the radios, aimed at demoralizing troops.

The war's end also presented Hall with the prospect of no job after Congress canceled funding for the military intelligence operation which "would not be necessary in peacetime."

Hall was designated to liquidate the operation within 30 days. Instead, he and a co-worker set about trying to keep the operation alive and "made no effort to fire anyone."

Hall said the two went to newspapers, congressman and anyone who would listen urging them of the "importance of intelligence monitoring during peacetime."

It worked. The operation continued and Hall worked on a committee to establish what overseas operation would still be useful to the United States.

Hall was then assigned to find a chief for the North African operation in Cairo and off he went to take a position himself in 1945.

On a 45-day trip abroad a troop transport out of the Brooklyn navy yard, Hall and his wife set out for